



Revue des études slaves

LXXXV-3 | 2014
Taras Ševčenko (1814-1861)

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/res/474>

DOI: 10.4000/res.474

ISSN: 2117-718X

Publisher

Institut d'études slaves

Printed version

Date of publication: 30 December 2014

Number of pages: 457-474

ISBN: 978-2-7204-0532-7

ISSN: 0080-2557

Electronic reference

Roman Koropecj, « The Self-Portraits of Taras Shevchenko An Attempt at a Typology », *Revue des études slaves* [Online], LXXXV-3 | 2014, Online since 26 March 2018, connection on 18 December 2020.
URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/res/474> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/res.474>

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THE SELF-PORTRAITS OF TARAS SHEVCHENKO AN ATTEMPT AT A TYPOLOGY*

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In the title essay to his collection *Shevchenko iakoho ne znaiemo* (The Shevchenko We Do Not Know), George G. Grabowicz maintains that “the overarching feature of our image of Shevchenko [...] is his unusually intense autobiographism.” This concern with self-representation is articulated not only in poems, first-person prose fiction, diary, and correspondence, but also in the medium that for Shevchenko was unquestionably as expressive in this regard as the verbal, “his visual art, wherein he depicts himself in an extraordinary number of self-portraits [...]”¹ In this particular respect, as one who engaged time and time again with his own image over the span of many years, Shevchenko belongs among such artists as Albrecht Dürer, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, and his slightly younger contemporary, Gustave Courbet, or, for that matter, Egon Schiele and Frida Kahlo.

Of course, any discussion of self-portraiture—but especially as it was practiced by Shevchenko—by its very nature cannot but reference the autobiographical; I myself shall be doing so often enough below. Yet a self-portrait is also conditioned by precedents, conventions, and devices that situate it within the history of art and within a given artist’s own variations on the genre.² It is this, broadly speaking, formal vocabulary that must be examined first if we hope to grasp the nature of Shevchenko’s self-fashioning in his artistic production, and all the more so if we are to understand the relationship of the latter to the verbal articulations of his autobiographism.

* I would like to express my gratitude to Christa Aube of the Getty Research Institute for her many thoughtful suggestions for improving this essay as well as to David Woodruff, also of the GRI, for help with terminology.

1. George G. Grabowicz, *Шевченко, якого не знаємо*, Kyïv, Krytyka, 2000, p. 110-111.

2. See Ludmilla Jordanova, “The Body of the Artist,” in: Anthony Bond, and Joanna Woodall (eds.), *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary*, London, National Portrait Gallery, 2005, p. 46.

My own task in this regard is as modest as it is preliminary, although this in itself should indicate to what extent Shevchenko's visual art remains understudied. Rather than examining the self-portraits in and as a chronological series, that is, as a visual autobiography,³ I propose instead a descriptive taxonomy based on a set of intrinsic (compositional) criteria.⁴ I then discuss briefly some of the salencies within each type as well as certain extrinsic phenomena that invariably inscribe them. By the same token, I keep interpretation to a minimum.

HEAD- AND BUST-LENGTH SELF-PORTRAITS

In the space of some twenty years (from 1840–1841 to 1861), in other words, over the course of his entire adult life, Shevchenko produced approximately thirty images that feature his head/bust—what he referred to in his correspondence as his “поличчя/поличіє”⁵—in a variety of media: pastel, ink, pencil, sepia, watercolor, etching, and oil. Some of the earliest appear among sketches of sundry heads, body parts, and entire figures on the margins of an 1840 letter to his brother Mykyta (*Mystets'ka spadshchyna* 1. 2: fig. 254) and on an autograph of the poem *Mar'iana-Chernytsia* (Fig. 1),⁶ when Shevchenko was attending the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg.⁷ Identical to the drawings of others' heads on the same page, almost all of these self-portraits are presented in profile facing left, arguably the most elemental form of the genre but one to which Shevchenko never resorted elsewhere, as if reserving it for those closest to him, and himself—on the margins.⁸ A few are schematic to the point of being self-caricatures: a single line suggesting brow and lips; a dot, the eye; and two sharp L's for the nose and chin. On the same leaf (of the *Mar'iana-Chernytsia* autograph), however, there are two rather detailed images of the head en face, turned left on an elongated neck but with the eyes gazing at something other than a viewer.

3. Besides the early overview by Novyts'kyi, “Автопортрети,” see Vladych's *Avtoportrety* as well as his entry “Автопортрети Тараса Шевченка,” in *Шевченківський словник*, 2 vols., Kyiv, AN URSR, 1976, s.v.; and Iatsiuk's *Рукою власною : студії над автопортретами Т. Г. Шевченка*. Despite its efforts to situate Shevchenko's self-portraits typologically within the conventions of romantic self-portraiture, the “semiotic” study by M. V. Panova and A. V. Shilo is as misguided as it is useless, *Автопортретний цикл Т. Г. Шевченко*, Kharkiv, Novoe Slovo, 2003.

4. My typology is based on the one outlined by Omar Calabrese, *Artists' Self-portraits*, trans. Marguerite Shore, New York – London, Abbeville Press, 2006, p. 125–159.

5. E.g., Shevchenko to O. M. Bodians'kyi, 3 Nov. 1854, *Повне зібрання творів* 6:106 [= PZT], 6 vols., Kyiv, AN URSR, 1963–1964; Shevchenko to M. M. Lazarevs'kyi, 29 Nov. 1857, *ibid.*, p. 182.

6. Taras Shevchenko, *Мистецька спадщина* [= MS], 4 vols., Kyiv, AN URSR, 1961.

7. Volodymyr Iatsiuk, “Чи Шевченкові профілі Шевченка?” argues convincingly enough that two portraits of Shevchenko in profile from 1859 are in fact self-portraits, *Живопис – моя професія: Шевченкознавчі етюди*, Kyiv, Radians'kkyi pys'mennyk, 1989, p. 252–263.

8. Cf. Shevchenko's comment on his letter to his brother: “Leave it to a painter—I've drawn all kinds of things everywhere. Forgive me, I forgot that this is a letter to you, and I've gone and drawn all over it—sometimes I get lost in thought without telling you” (PZT 6:11).

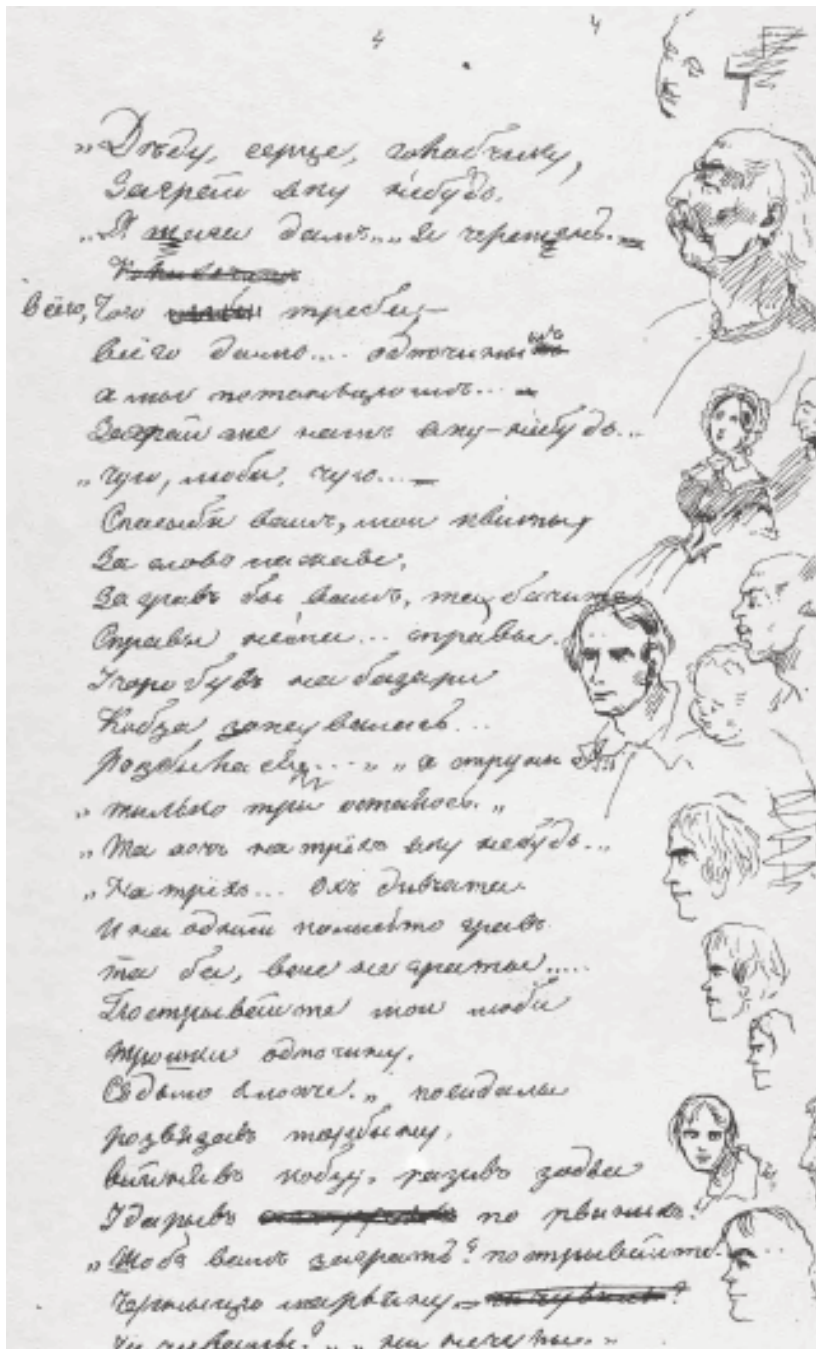


Fig. 1. Self-Portraits on the Margins of the Poem *Mar'iana-chernytsia*,
ink, [ca. 22 Nov.] 1841. MS 1.2, fig. 263

Like the profiles, they neither (self-)contemplate nor are meant to communicate. It is telling, then, that of the seven more or less frontal self-portraits Shevchenko executed explicitly for others, two, both in oil and both from 1861, were intended for public exhibition (Vladych, *Avtoportrety*, XXV; *MS* 4: fig. 67), as if, in contrast to the marginal sketches in profile, the occasion required not only a medium but a pose traditionally associated with abstraction, universality, and hence intimations of permanence.⁹

The remainder of the self-portraits in this first group consists of bust-lengths, usually from upper- to mid-chest, but in a few instances (e.g., *MS* 4: fig. 53; 1860), when Shevchenko poses sitting, from as low as the lap and thus include a depiction of a partial or entire immobile arm. These are overwhelmingly three-quarter views set against anonymous backgrounds, which Shevchenko often dramatizes with vigorous abstract strokes of pencil, chalk, or échope around the head (e.g., *MS* 2: fig. 1; 1847) and on one occasion (*MS* 2: fig. 47; 1849-1850) dramatizes further by surrounding it with objects that speak allegorically to his condition in military exile: a sword, a timepiece, and a drawing of a woman. Some of the heads are posed with eyes facing left, but most toward the right—an indication, of course, that the right-handed artist was using a mirror¹⁰ (or, in one instance [*MS* 3: fig. 16; [1851]], a jug of water¹¹) to create them. In all of them, Shevchenko gazes directly at the viewer *vel* mirror image (or some point beyond), in some with probing intensity, in others with aloofness, in still others with weariness and resignation.

Almost all of these self-portraits, including those that are now lost, were originally intended not for public display but rather as private mementos for friends. Most were executed by Shevchenko during his ten years of exile, just as one now has photographs taken of oneself (or by oneself) to send to others as a reminder of one's existence and circumstances.¹² And it is precisely their function as such, as vehicles of communication about an absent self, that determines their morphology.

In a letter to Andrii Lyzohub accompanying an 1849 sepia drawing of himself in uniform (Fig. 2), Shevchenko writes, "I'm sending you this grenadier (it's me); as you look at him, remember me."¹³ What is striking here is the

9. Cf. Omar Calabrese, *Artists' Self-portraits...*, p. 126-134. For a different perspective on the connection between self-portraiture and painting in oils, see Anthony Bond, "Performing the Self?" in *Self Portrait...*, p. 36-37.

10. Cf. *MS* 1.1: fig. 85, where Shevchenko depicts himself drawing his mirror image, hence holding his pencil in what in the image is his left hand. I shall discuss this self-portrait in greater detail below.

11. See the reminiscences of Bronisław Zaleski (1890), in *Спогади про Тараса Шевченка*, I. O. Dzeverin (ed.), Kyiv, Khudozhnia literatura, 1982, p. 253.

12. See L. V. Vladych, *Автопортрети Тараса Шевченка*, Kyiv, Mystetstvo, 1973, in ShS, s.v.; and Grabowicz, "Епілог : Прихований Шевченко (Підтексти самозображення та рецепції)," in his *Шевченко*, p. 299-300.

13. Shevchenko to A. I. Lyzohub, 29 December 1849, *PZT* 6: 59. Cf. his commentary in an 1849 letter to Varvara Repnina accompanying another, now inextant, self-portrait: "I'm sending you [a portrait of myself] as a reminder of me, your unfortunate friend" (Shevchenko to V. M. Repnina, 14 November 1849, *PZT* 6: 57).



Fig. 2. Self-Portrait, sepia, [ca. 29 Dec. 1849], MS 2, fig. 52

movement—explicit in word, implicit in picture—between the first, second, and third persons.¹⁴ The act of self-portraiture transforms the “I” into a “he,” that is, into an object of reflective—specular—self-contemplation that is simultaneously staged for the gaze of the addressee-viewer, a “you,” in whom the subject’s projected (and, in the letters accompanying them, verbally suggested) guise (“a grenadier,” “an abject hetmanite,” “a bearded, unbowed *kobzar*”¹⁵) is meant to elicit a given set of emotions.¹⁶ Indeed, thanks to the very nature of a self-portrait’s inscription of point of view, it forces empathetic identification with the subject: Shevchenko in effect demands that his viewer see him as he sees—or, rather, projects—himself.

14. On pronominal shifts in Shevchenko’s poetry, see Grabowicz, “Перехрестя ‘Тризни’,” in his *Шевченко*, p. 32-33; and Rubchak, “Shevchenko’s Profiles and Masks: The Ironic Roles of the Self in the Poetry of Kobzar,” in *Shevchenko and the Critics*, George S. N. Luckyj (ed.), Toronto – Buffalo – London, University of Toronto Press, 1980, p. 401.

15. See Shevchenko to I. M. Bodians’kyi, 3 Nov. 1854, *PZT* 6:106 (accompanying a lost self-portrait); and Shevchenko to M. M. Lazarevs’kyi, 22 Feb. 1858, *ibid.*, p. 207 (accompanying MS 4:18).

16. On Shevchenko’s tendency to manipulate his correspondents’ emotions, see Grabowicz, “Епілог,” p. 279-282.

The series of self-portraits Shevchenko executed on the basis of photographs (e.g., *MS* 4: fig. 52) is paradigmatic in this regard. Whereas the photographs could now (and did) serve as mementos in and of themselves,¹⁷ Shevchenko nonetheless insisted on “subjectivizing” them by recasting them as etchings. By modifying the play of light and shadow, highlighting or minimizing certain details of face and dress, and expressively dramatizing the background with his characteristic dynamic lines he in effect reasserts his “I,” transforming in the process what was originally an impersonal image of himself into an allegorical enunciation about himself.¹⁸

HALF -FIGURES WITH EXPRESSIVE HANDS

Shevchenko achieves an even higher degree of allegorization by expanding the framing of two self-portraits to half-length while at the same time depicting what Omar Calabrese calls “expressive hands.”¹⁹ And not coincidentally, perhaps, it is here more explicitly than elsewhere that Shevchenko himself explores the intersection of his visual and verbal art. Two self-portraits—a China-ink drawing dated 1843 (*MS* 1.1: fig. 85 [21–26 Nov.] 1843) and an aquatint etching from 1860 of a self-portrait executed originally in 1845 that has not survived (*MS* 4: fig. 60)²⁰—depict Shevchenko sitting behind a table or desk gazing at the viewer/mirror (an exact mirror image in the case of the former) and with a pencil or pen poised over a sheet of paper—in other words, both self-portraits tell the story of an artist at work, focusing on the act of creation.²¹ But is he drawing or writing?

To Andrii Kozachkovs’kyi it was evident that the self-portrait from 1845 was “of a national poet, boldly captured in the moment of poetic inspiration”²²—or so Volodymyr Iatsiuk maintains when he assumes that in his 1875 memoir Kozachkovs’kyi was referring to this and not to some other unidentified self-portrait.²³ But even were this not the case or, for that matter, had Kozachkovs’kyi simply been indulging in a bit of retrospective projection, the fact remains that the self-portrait as we now have it deftly employs convention—

17. In 1860 Shevchenko ordered a photograph of himself made for one person and subsequently dedicated his etching of it to another (*MS* 4: fig. 53, and commentary [38]). In turn, Shevchenko also personally inscribed several copies of the lithograph (*нерукотворний образ*) that Mykhailo Lazarevs’kyi had made of a self-portrait the poet sent him from Nizhnyi Novgorod in 1858. Cf. Iatsiuk, “Загадки ‘нерукотворного образу,’” in *Живопис – моя професія...*, p. 208–217.

18. Cf. Vladych, *Автопортрети...*, p. 25–26.

19. Calabrese, *Artists’ Self-Portraits...*, p. 146–147.

20. See *MS* 1.2: 408, as well as the reminiscences of Boris G. Sukhanov-Podkolozin (1885), in *Спогади...*, p. 357–358.

21. Cf. Calabrese, *Artists’ Self-Portraits...*, p. 146; and Grabowicz, “Самовизначення і децентрування: ‘Хіба самому написати [...]’ і проблема писання,” in *Шевченко, якого не знаємо...*, p. 70–71.

22. From his reminiscences of Shevchenko (1875), in *Спогади...*, p. 78.

23. Iatsiuk, *Рукою власною...*, p. 18–19. The editors of *MS* opt for the second possibility (see their commentary to 1.2.413).



Fig. 3. Self-Portrait, India ink [23-26 Nov.], *MS 1.1*, fig. 85, 1843.

the artist depicting himself at work on his self-portrait²⁴—in order to suggest, instead—or, rather, at the same time, a poet in the act of writing, figuratively conflating the two and by this very same token confusing the convention. This same tension is evident in the self-portrait from 1843 (Fig. 3), which, in fact, accompanied—indeed, “was part of,” as the poet insisted—Shevchenko’s gift of his poem *Trizna* to Varvara Repnina.²⁵

24. See Calabrese, *Artists’ Self-Portraits...*, p. 149-281, for numerous examples.

25. “Shevchenko gave me a notebook, all filled with his own hand, and said that a portrait of the author [...] was part of the manuscript of the poem.” V. N. Repnina to Charles Eynard, 27 Jan. 1844, in *Біографія Т. Г. Шевченка за спогадами сучасників* (ed.) V. Kh. Kosian et al., Kyiv, AN UkrSR, 1958. In his otherwise excellent discussion of the pivotal nature of *Trizna* for Shevchenko’s symbolic autobiography (in *Шевченко*, p. 17-51), Grabowicz does not consider the accompanying self-portrait.

That both of these self-portraits date from the “three years” during which Shevchenko underwent his transformation from romantic poet into a national poet-prophet while simultaneously a student and then graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts engaged in illustrating the Ukrainian countryside and its inhabitants only underscores the allegorical thrust of the two self-portraits. After all, the verb *nucamu* means both “to write” and “to paint”.

Chronicling as they do twenty remarkably eventful and for the most part remarkably difficult years that transformed a young romantic artist into a prematurely aged, physically scarred celebrity, it is these two groups of self-portraits that have come to constitute the canonic visual autobiography of Shevchenko,²⁶ with each image serving as an index marking a given point in the poet-artist’s life. As such, of course, that narrative could only emerge in retrospect, when the self-portraits that made their way into the hands of various individuals were gathered into a single, chronologically coherent whole.

Nonetheless, there is something very telling about Shevchenko’s reaction in 1860 when one of his students unexpectedly came upon a folder containing the self-portrait with the candle, which he thought had been lost. He apparently asked the fellow whether he recognized the figure depicted thereon. When he did not, Shevchenko laughed, “rubbing his bald pate, stroking his Zaporozhian mustache, and comparing himself, standing before a mirror, to the curly-haired, beardless young man with a candle in his hand. He maintained that the portrait once bore a great resemblance to the original and that it would be all the more a shame were this portrait of the *Kobzar* in his bloom to be lost irrevocably.”²⁷ Hence his decision to re-produce it as an etching. Yet no less telling in this regard is a self-portrait dating from 1859 (*MS 4*: fig. 48). One of the very few that Shevchenko executed in oil, the self-portrait is of the head, in three-quarter view, turned to the right; a thick shadow obscures the entire left side of the prematurely aged forty-five year old peering intently at the viewer. The composition, no less than the medium, suggests a deliberate commentary on what was Shevchenko’s earliest known self-portrait (*MS 1.1*: fig. 28; 1840–1841). Brightly lit against a dark background, a pale young man with a shock of thick dark hair and with enormous eyes gazes at the viewer with self-confident reserve.²⁸ Shevchenko, who so assiduously, and self-consciously, edited the poetry of his *Мала книжка* for publication,²⁹ was, it seems, himself acutely aware that his self-portraits, too, might constitute an autobiographical narrative.

26. See, for instance, the web page assembled by Maxim Tarnawsky, <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~tarn/courses/429-sp.html>

27. B. G. Sukhanov-Podkolozin, “Що пригадалося про Тараса Григоровича Шевченка” (1885), in *Спогади...*, p. 357–358.

28. Painted, according to one account, “during a severe illness” (F. P. Ponomar’ev [1880], in *Спогади...*, p. 67).

29. Cf. Grabowicz, “між словом і схемою (у пошуках Шевченкового тексту),” in *Шевченко...*, p. 132–178.

THREE-QUARTER-LENGTH FIGURE

Just one of Shevchenko's self-portraits (*MS 2*: fig. 124) depicts him in three-quarter-length, and it is only a sketch, perhaps for a self-portrait that either was never completed or does not survive, which *MS* dates broadly to between 1846 and April 1850. Nonetheless, it stands out for its composition, constituting in this respect a transition between the two groups discussed above and the final one in my taxonomy. Unlike the self-portraits of heads and busts and the half-figures, but like some of the images in the group to be discussed below, the figure stands outdoors, before what appears to be an urban structure (hence probably in Ors'k or Orenburg). Shevchenko's eyes, deeply set and dark beneath the brow, gaze three-quarters to the left but also downward—angrily? defiantly? with contempt?—thus shifting the picture's point of view slightly upward toward the mustachioed figure and the building(s) behind it. The balding Shevchenko, clad in what seems to be a uniform (compare, for example, *MS 2*: fig. 52; 1849) holds his trademark cap against his left side with both hands, together with something that resembles a pole—perhaps, a walking stick.³⁰ The expansion of space, together with the juxtaposition of the edifices in the background, the objects in the figure's hands, and the figure itself, generates an implicit narrative that, in contrast to the self-portraits of busts and heads, no longer requires suggestive commentary on the part of the artist; but, by the same token, neither is it as explicitly allegorical as the half-figure portraits. The significance of the story remains, however, *in posse*, barely recoverable because of the unfinished, schematic state of the drawing and its uncertain dating.

FULL FIGURE

The final category of self-portraits consists of two distinct subtypes: representations of Shevchenko's entire figure in which his facial features are clearly visible; and those of a figure that is anonymous but nonetheless recognizable as that of Shevchenko. Although I shall discuss the two groups separately, they share a feature that deserves noting at the outset. With the exception of several notebook sketches in profile (e.g., wearing a skull-cap, dressed in a frock-coat, hand in pocket; in a dressing-gown, right hand extended [*MS 1.2*: fig. 312–13; 1845–1846]; in uniform, hands clasped behind the back [2: fig. 57; 1846–1850]) that, like the sketches of heads discussed above, lack background and context; and the depiction, also in a sketchbook, of a striding, naked Shevchenko in oversized cap, boots, and cloak superimposed on a barely discernable outline of a shore of the Aral Sea with a disconnected image of a schooner in the background

30. In his 1848–1849 self-portrait in the buff (Grabowicz, *Шевченко, якого не знаємо...*, fig. 15) Shevchenko is holding a walking stick. On the significance of headgear in self-portraits, see Jordanova, "The Body," p. 51.

(Grabowicz, *Shevchenko*, fig. 15; 1848–1849)³¹—all of the self-portraits depicting Shevchenko's entire figure do so not only in concrete physical spaces, be it in- or outdoors, but in no less concrete, recognizable settings where they share the space with other figures. In so doing, they engender narratives in which a desire to depict a given "objective" situation is at the same time and to a greater or lesser degree allegorized. It is not, then, coincidental in this regard that some of them, too, are metathematic, depicting Shevchenko at work as an artist.

A. Full Figure with Identifiable Face

This group consists of four sepia drawings that Shevchenko executed during his exile in Novopetrovsk. All of them picture the artist in intimate settings insofar as they either completely or partially depict interiors and insofar as they juxtapose him with other figures. These too can be grouped neatly into two cycles that explore two distinct themes through, respectively, a remarkably congruent set of compositional features.

The drawings that constitute the first diptych (*MS 3*: fig. 32 [1853]; *MS 3*: fig. 56 [summer 1856–April 1857]) tell the story of Shevchenko's relationship with Kazakhs (*Kyrgyz*) by picturing him in the company of two little beggar boys (*baigushlar*) in a drawing from 1853, and of a Kazakh boy playing with a cat in a drawing dated 1856–1857.³² For all of their individual nuances, the two works are noteworthy for the compositional features they share. In both, the Kazakh boys, half-naked, barefoot, and wearing floppy Kazakh hats, appear in the foreground. They are framed by a doorway opening into an interior from within which the viewer gazes at them as well as at the figure of Shevchenko. The latter looms behind and above the boys, framed by the same doorways but in a compositionally distinct space. In the first of the two drawings that space is an adjacent room where Shevchenko, dressed in a uniform and framed by yet another sill, peers from behind a door toward the interior. He inclines his head to the right, gazing in the direction of the older of the two boys who, together with his little companion, looks at the viewer. In the second drawing (Fig. 4), Shevchenko depicts himself sitting outdoors, one leg crossed over the other, hands clasping the knee, dressed in a military greatcoat, and again (re)framed by what appears to be an opening in some sort of stockade beyond which, in the distance, can be seen a coppice and a clearing. Here too his head is inclined slightly to the right, with his gaze directed toward the boy sitting just inside the doorframe playing with the cat. In both drawings the light illuminating the

31. For a detailed analysis, see Grabowicz, "Епілог...", p. 293–301.

32. These in fact belong to a larger cycle of four that includes an image of Kazakh boys begging beneath a window (*MS 3*: fig. 45) and a Kazakh boy asleep on the shore of the Caspian Sea (*ibid.*, fig. 57). For an analysis of Shevchenko's poetic and artistic treatments of Kazakhs, see my "Taras Shevchenko's Encounters with the Kazaks."



Fig. 4. Self-Portrait with a Kazakh Boy Playing with a Cat, sepia, [summer 1856 - April 1857], MS 3: fig. 56.

Kazakhs emanates from the space occupied by Shevchenko following the trajectory of his gaze. Directed at the Kazakhs simultaneously from behind and from above, the gaze and the light together seem to suggest the paternalistic stance of an ostensibly enlightening colonizer, in whose mission Shevchenko's military garb willy-nilly implicates him. The entire composition, however, to an even greater degree implicates the viewer, who gazes both at the boys and at Shevchenko from within the dark interior of a space into which the artist has introduced the boys. His gaze, at once provocative and bemused, compels the

viewer to consider as much his fate as theirs, which they are thus configured as implicitly sharing.

The second cycle in this group (*MS* 2: fig. 12 [1857]; 3: fig. 15 [1851]) evinces an analogous set of compositional parallels. Both drawings depict the interior of a yurt, on the floors and hanging on the sides of which are various everyday objects, more spartan in the case of the 1851 image drawn during an expedition on the Caspian Mangyshlak Peninsula, comfortably domestic in the case of the second drawing depicting Shevchenko's private living quarters in Novopetrovsk in 1857.³³ In the earlier work he depicts himself seated behind a portable table sharpening a pencil, while a companion sits cross-legged to his right on an oriental rug drinking tea and staring vacantly into space. In the picture from 1857 the artist reclines to the side on a sofa, his head resting on his left hand, his right arm lying on his thigh holding a pen. Propped before him in both images is a sketchbook, its back toward the viewer, in which Shevchenko is presumably drawing the scene. In the center of both drawings stands the figure of a half-naked man apparently posing for the artist. In the picture from 1857, the model, illuminated by a shaft of light streaming down from a window to his right, occupies center stage, his hands demonstratively on hips as he gazes coquettishly at the viewer/mirror, while Shevchenko's gaze hovers between him and the sketchbook.

In the picture from 1851 (Fig. 5), the model has his back turned to the viewer, contemplating a drawing in his left hand that turns out to be one of Shevchenko's own (of a gypsy). The artist, in turn, gazes neither at his sketchbook nor directly at his model but rather also at the drawing, as if awaiting the latter's opinion of it. What Shevchenko effects in both works is a kind of doubling in which the two models simultaneously enact, *qua* models, and admire, *qua* viewers, the artist's mastery of portraiture, in the first, indirectly, as a finished artefact in the model's hand, in the second, *in status nascendi*, as it were, inscribed in the model's admiring gaze. And just as in the drawings with the Kazakh boys, the insistence of Shevchenko's own gaze forces the viewer to consider his, the artist's, perspective as part of a larger whole.

Whatever these four images convey as allegories of the self, they are all the more remarkable precisely for the way Shevchenko manipulates his viewer's response by reconfiguring the act of self-contemplation. Whereas in the first two groups of self-portraits he utilizes the implicit presence of a mirror (or, as the case may be, photographer) and the constricted frame that it establishes to compel the viewer to observe the projected image from Shevchenko's vantage point, in this group of self-portraits the expansion of physical space to include other figures and objects, their placement and framing, the lighting, as well as

33. On the dating of this picture, see Hlafiira Petrivna Palamarchuk, *Нескоренний Прометей*, Kyiv, Mystetstvo, 1968, p. 51-53.

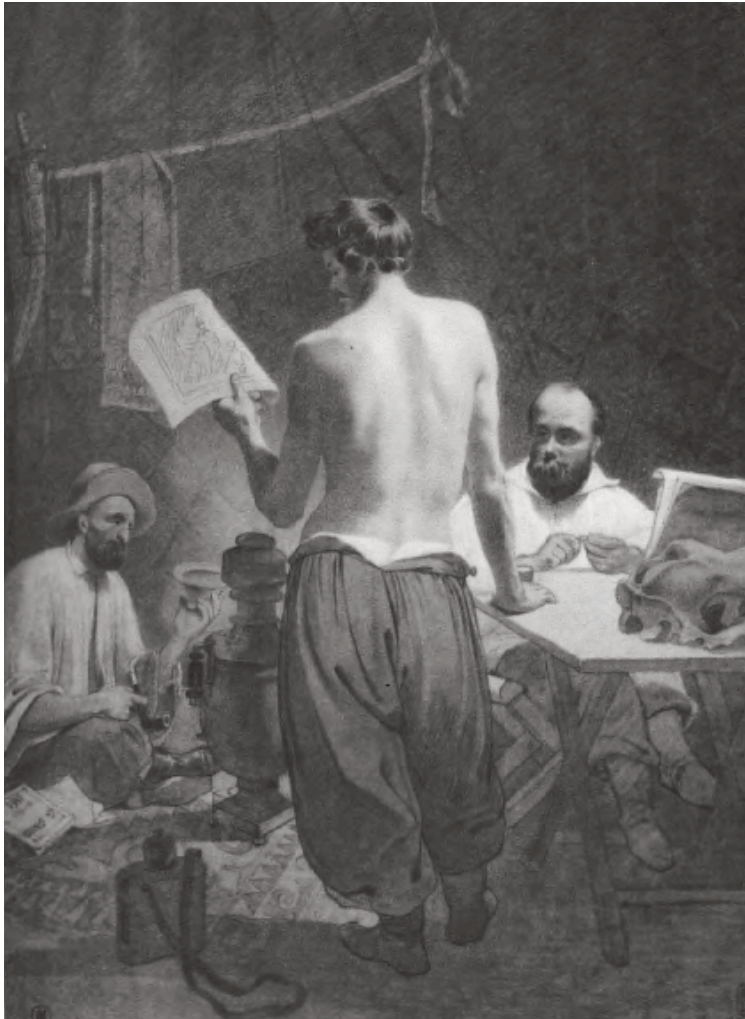


Fig. 5. Self-Portrait among Friends, sepia and Chinese white, [July–Aug. 1851], *MS 3*: fig. 14.

the placement of Shevchenko's own figure and the direction of his gaze all serve to mediate the viewer's image of the artist, who now appears as part of a material world, situated in a web of social interactions. This "decentering," to use Grabowicz's term³⁴ (quite literal in the case of the drawing from 1857) shifts the self-portrait programmatically from the first person to the third, transforming an act of (narcissistic) self-contemplation into one that seeks to view the self from the position of the viewer-other. The parallel here with Shevchenko's novella *Khudozhnik* [The artist] (1856) is striking: an ostensible other (presumably Ivan

34. "Самовизначення і децентрування," *Шевченко, якого не знаємо...*, p. 69.

Soshenko) narrates in the first person his acquaintance with the eponymous protagonist of the story, the facts of whose life correspond (up to a point) to those of Shevchenko's own during his early years in St. Petersburg.

Yet at the same time, the self-portraits from 1851 and 1857 serve as a kind of commentary on the very nature of self-portraiture, a baring of the device, as it were, in which Shevchenko, to paraphrase Anthony Bond and Joanna Woodall, "conflate[s] the roles of creator 'behind' the work of art, subject 'within' and viewer 'before' it.... By collapsing the distinctions between the painter and the painting, the artist and the viewer, the mirror and the world," he in effect constitutes himself "as a sovereign individual: everything is ultimately subject to the creative ego."³⁵

B. Full Figure with Vague Features

In this final group of self-portraits—or, more properly perhaps, genre drawings—Shevchenko takes this perspectival shift a step further, expanding the space to depict his figure as one, nearly anonymous, object among many in a larger composition. That the figure is that of Shevchenko can be deduced from the presence of distinctive features one finds in other self-portraits (posture, shape and condition of body and head, garb) and biographical givens. Interestingly, the first tentative essay of this type is also one of Shevchenko's earliest (*MS* 1.2: fig. 240), a sketch in a notebook from 1839–1842 of a young man dressed in a *siurtuk* at an easel with his back to the viewer, presumably in a class at the St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts. Devoid of any contextual background besides depictions on the same leaf of other similarly dressed young men at easels, the sketch bears an inscription by another, much later hand identifying the student as "кобзар Шевченко."³⁶

The three remaining images in this group include two landscapes and one interior (*MS* 1.1: fig. 111 [1845]; 2: fig. 30 [1848–1849]; 3: fig. 70 [1856–1857]).³⁷ Their dates happen to coincide, respectively, with three of the most critical periods in Shevchenko's creative life: the "three years"; the Aral expedition; and the exile in Novopetrovsk. (There are no surviving self-portraits of this kind from the post-exile period, or, for that matter, of any kind other than of heads and busts.) Unlike the groups discussed above, they share no single compositional feature beyond the expansion of depicted space and Shevchenko's presence. As such, however, and not only by virtue of their incommensurability, these three self-portraits are perhaps Shevchenko's thickest.

35. "Preface" to Bond & Woodall, *Self Portrait*..., p. 12.

36. Without adducing any arguments to this effect, the editors of *MS* simply state that the identification is "mistaken" (1.2:22). The shape of the head and shoulders is, however, unmistakably that of Shevchenko.

37. I would dearly like to include in this group two watercolors from the Aral expedition (*MS* 2: fig. 20; *ibid.*, fig. 22) that depict encampments. Both feature a figure wearing a cap similar to the one worn by Shevchenko at the time and seemingly engaged in either drawing or writing. The figures, however, are simply too small to be identified with any greater degree of certainty.



Fig. 6. Self-Portrait of Shevchenko Drawing a Peasant House, sepia, [spring 1845], MS 1.1, fig. 111.

The first, an unfinished sepia drawing from the spring of 1845, (Fig. 6) depicts a village homestead in Ukraine, the locus of Shevchenko's own origins. A young man wearing a visored cap and pelerine-like coat kneels in the courtyard, his head turned intently toward the house; on his left knee rests a pad on which he appears to be drawing... the cottage? the woman standing in the doorway? the barely discernable (unfinished) figure of a woman to her left? He is flanked on one side by a peasant man who stands behind him holding a bottle in one hand (and what would presumably be a glass in the other) and on the other by a young boy holding a stick. While the dimensions of the figures in relation to each other suggest that they inhabit the same world on an equal footing, a world which in any case towers over and embraces them all, the figure of the artist is nonetheless alien here. His attire is that of a city-dweller, a traveler, or, to be more precise, an itinerant artist. The peasant's gesture betokens hospitality proffered to strangers, but to which the figure of the artist, absorbed in his work, his back turned toward the peasant, seems oblivious, just as the boy holding the stick appears oblivious to the artist—he is blind, it seems (what Jacques Derrida argues is the very figure of self-portraiture³⁸). A fence separates the artist from the house. Indeed, as the cottage's dark window intimates, he is on the outside unable to see in, his way blocked, in fact, by the woman in the doorway.

38. Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Chicago – London, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 55-72.

However one chooses to interpret this image, it brings to the fore structural features that inform all of the self-portraits in this group. By introducing a likeness of himself into what would otherwise be an ordinary ethnographic drawing Shevchenko transforms it into a narrative about himself. Not only is the figure of the artist here central in terms of placement, which Shevchenko underscores with the incongruously indicial stick leaning against the fence, it is also the focus of the others' gazes, which thus direct our gaze as well. He is the center of attention; the house, the trees, the peasant family all serve ultimately to tell his story.

The watercolor from the 1848–1849 Aral expedition at once reiterates this narrative and recontextualizes it (Fig. 7). The landscape depicts a party of seven men that has, it seems, just landed on a shore of the Aral Sea. Each is either engaged in a specific task—hunting, repairing a skiff, taking and recording measurements—or observing the activity: a tall man in a wide-brimmed hat and Shevchenko himself, recognizable by his cap, physique, shape of head, and whiskers, standing behind a red-shirted colleague as he peers into a sextant. In his left hand Shevchenko holds what appears to be a white sheet of paper, the subtle signifier of his contribution to the expedition as its illustrator yet as such just another anonymous member of the team, ready, like his colleagues, to execute the particular task assigned to him. In Shevchenko's case, however, anonymity here is doubly marked.

The 1848–1849 watercolor, like all of Shevchenko's drawings from the Aral expedition, could be included in its record only anonymously. After all, he was working illegally, prohibited as he was from painting in exile, which fact, however, did not deter the expedition's well-intentioned commander from taking him on as its illustrator. By insinuating an image of himself among those of the other members of the expedition, Shevchenko, like some medieval scribe inscribing his likeness on the margins of a manuscript, was in effect autographing what would otherwise be an unsigned artefact, thus fixing for the purposes of posterity his role—by any measure a pivotal one—as the expedition's illustrator.³⁹

This gesture also informs the final self-portrait in this group, where it serves, however, a somewhat different purpose (Fig. 8). The 1856–1857 sepia drawing depicts a large, crowded military barrack in Novopetrovsk, perhaps on a Sunday or holiday. The day's laundry dries on lines stretched beneath the ceiling; various articles of military gear hang on the walls. In the foreground several figures lie on a bunk exhausted. Behind them others (both male and female) are carousing drunkenly, their figures illuminated against the murk of the interior by a bright shaft of light that stretches across the entire room until it reaches—and hence draws the viewer's attention to—the barely discernable figure of

39. On the self-portrait as signature, see Calabrese, *Artists' Self-Portraits*..., p. 29–47. Cf. also Philippe Lejeune, "Looking at a Self-Portrait," in his *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary, Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press, t. 52, 1989, *Theory and History of Literature*, p. 111–113.



Fig. 7: Self-Portrait among Other Members of the Aral Expedition, watercolor, [12-22 Sept. 1848; 22-30 Aug. 1849], *MS 2*, fig. 30.



Fig. 8. Self-Portrait in a Barrack, sepia [1856–July 1857], *MS 3*, fig. 70.

Shevchenko, inscribing his presence among the denizens of a Russian imperial outpost. Drawn in profile, his bald pate and moustache unmistakable, he sits against a wall dressed in uniform, looking, it seems, into a knapsack on his lap. Facing him stands a diminutive Kazakh child in a native hat holding what appears to be a large roll or flatbread that he may have just received from Shevchenko. Yet if the depiction of this pair ties this sepia to the cycle of drawings with Kazakh boys, it at the same time refocuses it by framing it within a larger social setting. Shevchenko and the child are pictured here as a single compositional unit, set apart physically from their surroundings and at the same time oblivious to them by virtue of their juxtaposition: the two are the only figures in the drawing facing each other eye to eye. Theirs is an autonomous microcosm of genuine human interaction, made all the more humane by the incongruities of age, ethnicity, and colonial relationship.

There exists one more drawing that deserves attention, if only as a commentary to the self-portrait in the barracks. The very same interior, albeit substantially modified, appears in the sixth image of Shevchenko's cycle *The Parable of the Prodigal Son* (MS 3: fig. 67), where it is transformed into a scene inspired—and by the very same token sacralized—by the Biblical narrative. The drawing depicts the eponymous hero gagged with a bit and tied half-naked to a post while in the background the inhabitants of the barrack carouse. Although the lighting is now completely different, falling as it does on the prisoner in the foreground, the figure of Shevchenko is still discernible, in the same pose and the same isolated location as in the drawing upon which it is based, and just as oblivious to its surroundings. The figure of the Kazakh child, however, has been erased. What remains is a representation of the artist (by) himself, who now serves at once as witness, commentator, and participant in an allegory of a different kind.